

The First Shot

Having been occupied with the cause throughout almost my entire twenty-five years of life, I either paid no attention to myself, or at times I detested myself to such a degree that I was prepared to annihilate not only all memory of myself, but my very person. In view of this the reader will understand that I lived without thinking that I would one day write my biography.

—Ivan Khudiakov, *Attempt at an Autobiography*

At some point in the spring of 1865, Ishutin met a young ethnographer then living in St. Petersburg. His name was Ivan Khudiakov, and although he was fairly new to serious radicalism, he already had years of study behind him, and a considerable list of publications on various aspects of folklore and popular education. German Lopatin, himself just becoming a radical activist, remembered Khudiakov in 1865 as “short, lean, sickly and extremely nervous, with a high-pitched voice and small, restless eyes. His small, drawn figure always seemed to be listening for some sound or exploring some corner with his eyes. An attentive observer could not fail to see in him a turbulent, active, fanatical nature,” although this fanaticism was “of the sprightly, laughing, chatty ‘*bon garçon*’ kind,” underneath which Khudiakov single-mindedly pursued his aims, sparing neither himself nor others.¹ One sign of his nervousness was a little smile that he could not

repress; throughout Khudiakov's life he seems to have been hated by those in authority (in a general, not specifically political sense), and one reason was that nervous, involuntary, "impudent" smile. Another was his courage.²

He first met the *Ishutintsy* when several of them had to go to St. Petersburg on some matter pertaining to the Kaluga glass factory, and they needed a reliable contact. Grigory Eliseev, then in Moscow, told them to look up Khudiakov, and they did so. A short time later—in June 1865—Khudiakov came to Moscow to meet Ishutin. They hit it off right away, and for the next year it is proper to think of Khudiakov as closely allied with Ishutin, despite the fact that he continued to live in St. Petersburg. Khudiakov had his small network of radical friends and contacts, but to refer to them *tout court* as "the St. Petersburg underground" (as Vilenskaia and other Soviet historians have done) is to inflate their significance.

Khudiakov, like other folklore enthusiasts, had been pushed to the Left by his interest in the *narod*; and in his intellectual brilliance, his heroic resolve, and his human stuntedness he stands out even in the strange world of the "1860s people." We know his early life largely from his memoirs, a litany of self-revelation, self-concealment, and self-hatred that the historian must use with extreme caution.³ Khudiakov tells the reader in this small volume that he came into the world at seven o'clock on the evening of January 1, 1842, "with a cry of despair." His family, it was believed, had been resident in Siberia since the sixteenth century; his forebears had been prosperous merchants, but in the last couple of generations the family had come down a bit in the world. His father was a decent, earnest, rather humorless man who had done very well at the Tobolsk gymnasium in the 1820s, but had no money for the university and ended by eking out his living as an educational bureaucrat in towns and cities of north-central Siberia. His disappointments were somehow carried over into his son's life; the young man annexed his father's miseries and frustrations to his own. The father's anger also took a quasi-political form; he became acquainted with sev-

eral of the exiled Decembrists, and the boy early learned that they were to be pitied and respected, not despised.

Khudiakov spent the first ten years of his life in the town of Ishim, near Tobolsk, where his father was a school inspector. In his memoirs, Khudiakov admitted that his father was a pretty good sort, despite his ignorance of history and gymnastics(!), and that he himself was a well-loved only child. (There is, significantly, no mention of his mother.) Nevertheless, his account of his childhood is basically a tale of woe. He enumerates for the reader a long list of accidents, including a truly spectacular one. When he was a very little boy, Ivan grabbed a horse by the tail and was kicked hard in the testicles. The precise aftereffects of this experience are impossible to ascertain. But he recounts the episode in detail, remarking pointedly that it explains why "with respect to both face and voice" he was subsequently so often mistaken for a castrato. Thus embedded in Khudiakov's account of his own life, the episode takes on a larger metaphorical significance: Khudiakov *felt* that he had been kicked in the balls by Life. It is equally certain that he suffered from some kind of deep sexual uncertainty. His attitude toward women in general and his wife (whom he married in 1865) in particular was equivocal. He was theoretically a strong feminist; he had written an article on "The Woman in Pre-Petrine Russia"; but he was overwhelmed by his wife's (apparently perfectly normal) sexuality, and his view of marriage was that the stronger partner was bound to enslave the weaker. The chapter in his memoirs on his marriage abounds in denunciations not only of his bride but of the tendencies toward greed and flightiness apparent in all women.⁴ Maybe they'll improve when they're *really* emancipated, he wrote, but it is obvious that he's not too sanguine.⁵ After his arrest and condemnation, Khudiakov forbade his wife to follow him into exile.

In the early 1850s, when Khudiakov was about ten, his father was transferred to a slot in the educational bureaucracy in Tobolsk, and the boy was able to continue his education in a reasonably good gymnasium. He did very well, graduating at the top of his class; still, he complained that the school had "killed" his

intellectual and moral force and made him a "physical and intellectual skeleton."*

Khudiakov spent the year 1858-59 at the University of Kazan'. He was subsequently rather vainglorious about his ability to put dull professors down, and sweepingly contemptuous of the faculty, as were many of the brighter and more radical students there. He read Herzen at Kazan' and became an atheist, but his sympathy with the radicals at the university was general, not specific. If only Shchapov had been a professor then, he laments, he might have "found the true path five years earlier." He spent a lot of time on his studies, concentrating on ethnography and folklore; toward the end of the year he decided to pursue those studies in Moscow, under the illustrious Professor F. I. Buslaev, the following year. The second semester in Kazan' ended badly, however; he was unable to take his examinations and seems to have had a kind of small breakdown.

Khudiakov was based in Moscow between 1859 and 1862, studying with Buslaev, the first Russian academic folklorist of real significance and the country's foremost adept of the "mythological school" that derived from the brothers Grimm. The initial framework that Khudiakov learned for interpreting folktales and songs was thus not very well suited for the purposes he soon evolved. Wilhelm Grimm, in 1856, had put forward the central articles of faith: the folktales that were being collected and studied in many parts of the world showed such close resemblances that they had to be derived from a common source in "Indo-European antiquity"; and these tales were "broken-down myths," which could be interpreted only through a proper understanding of the ancient myths from which they derived.⁶

Buslaev, who had begun his literary studies as a student of Stepan Shevyrëv, the regime-oriented nationalist critic, was by this time a firm, if creative, believer in Grimm's legacy. Although Khudiakov soon repudiated Buslaev on political grounds as a teacher and exemplar, he found it much more difficult to emancipate himself from Romantic doctrines of an ancient Indo-Iranian

*Earlier he refers to his extreme piety and his addiction to the prevalent habit of onanism, both of which, he seems to believe, contributed to his feeble health.

people and the mythic base of the folktales he was collecting; not the least of the theory's strengths was that it seemed to account for the remarkable similarities in tales from cultures at the opposite ends of the globe. The seductiveness of mythology complicated and restricted Khudiakov's feeling that much folk material ought to be interpreted as popular history.⁷ Unwilling to jettison the broken-down myth idea, he retained it as the base of the tale, which then, he believed, became mingled with and encrusted by the *narod*'s own contribution, in which he was more interested.

From the guarded language that Khudiakov used in his memoirs, it is not easy to get a sense of how his political attitudes developed in these crucial years when it was so easy to be "radicalized." Hostility to religion and a disposition to attribute it to popular ignorance were apparent in his work almost from the first, and strong generational antipathies soon made their appearance as well. After leaving Moscow, Khudiakov came to reject Buslaev as an "archaeologist" cut off from "life,"⁸ and he was scathing about his teachers—the older ones most of all. L. F. Panteleev, the Land and Liberty organizer, got in touch with Khudiakov late in 1862, having heard, he later wrote, that Khudiakov was being politicized. But Khudiakov refused to involve himself with Panteleev or his projects.⁹ Nevertheless, Khudiakov was already experimenting with propagandistic material in folkloristic form; his *Russian Booklet* (*Russkaia Knizhka*), an anthology of proverbs, short tales, and essays, intended to "enlighten" the *narod*, appeared in 1863.

Khudiakov worked hard in Moscow to acquire the tools of his trade, and he began actively collecting folktales, riddles, and songs. The amount he published in his early and mid-twenties is amazing, particularly in view of his concurrent struggles with poverty. Between 1860 and 1863, he produced three small booklets of *Great Russian Fairy Tales*¹⁰ and two collections of *Great Russian Riddles*; his considerable reputation as a collector rests on these volumes. His *Manual of Self-Instruction* (1865, 1867) was a collection of material aimed at peasants teaching themselves to read. It begins with the alphabet, goes on to proverbs (with a certain tendency: for example, "God is high and the Tsar

is far away”), and ends with a series of simple narratives with socialist or scientific content. It was one of Khudiakov’s favorites among his works; Herzen, Lopatin, and many other radicals liked it, used it in their classes, or took material from it. He also published several volumes containing the biographies of great men and women (Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, Washington, Lincoln, Abelard, Giordano Bruno, Columbus, Galileo, and so on), stressing the power of progressive ideas in history, however their authors may have been scorned and persecuted. Many of the heroes and heroines were of humble origins. *Ancient Russia* (*Drevniaia Rus’*, 1867) depicted Russian history prior to Peter the Great as a brutal usurpation of the liberties of the *narod* by tsars, princes, and boyars. Stenka Razin is unequivocally the hero of this essay in popular history, which almost certainly owes something to Shchapov’s view of the triumphs of Muscovy. Finally, Khudiakov published a number of scholarly articles on folkloric problems, in which his unstable blend of mythological theory and folklore as the people’s own history is clearly evident.¹¹ Despite its subversive intent and skill in execution, a surprisingly large percentage of his propagandistic work got through the censor (though not always unscathed) and became part of the increasing body of such materials upon which rural agitators and radical schoolteachers could draw.

Khudiakov took care that a hostile world would never know the details of how his anticlericalism, popular sympathies, and intellectual radicalism finally moved him into the position of an active revolutionary. His friendship with Eliseev, whom he met early in 1863, and his contacts with several Polish revolutionaries probably helped; he was certainly sympathetic to Poland’s cause during the rebellion that began in 1863, and he lived during 1864 and 1865 in a radical bohemia in which a number of Polish revolutionaries also moved.

It is a measure of how quickly Khudiakov became involved with Ishutin, and how deeply, that he and his wife left on a trip to Western Europe on August 6, 1865. The expedition was Ishutin’s idea, and it had been financed by Ermolov, the purpose being to find out what was going on in the radical emigration. It

seems that Ishutin had heard of some kind of organized revolutionary party abroad, with which he hoped to make contact. Khudiakov was away for more than three months, apparently spending most of his time in Geneva.* We have only the most fragmentary evidence about whom he saw there and of his impressions of various figures in the emigration.†

He returned, however, bearing important tidings. There was, he told Ishutin, a well-organized group in Western Europe devoted to a European revolutionary struggle and particularly to the extirpation of monarchs. The impact of this news on Ishutin and his friends was electric. It seems to have provided the impetus that crystallized their growing impatience and thirst for a revolutionary deed into more tightly knit organizational forms. It led, that is, to the formation of two "organizations" whose names are linked with that of Ishutin: Organization (*Organizatsiia*) and—more directly—Hell (*Ad*).¹²

Nevertheless, Khudiakov's news of what became known as the European Revolutionary Committee was merely a catalyst. Ishutin was already preoccupied in the fall of 1865 with tighter organization and the possibility of violent measures to precipitate the revolution, before Khudiakov's return on November 20. He appears to have instructed P. F. Nikolaev, a twenty-one-year-old student whom he trusted, to draw up a charter for a new kind of organization. Although the document has not survived,¹³ it set forth a program and structure that combined the group's commitment to Chernyshevsky's cooperative program with a new stress on hierarchical organization and direct action. A network of revolutionary circles was to be created, with the two most important in St. Petersburg and Moscow. Final authority was to rest with the "president" of the Moscow circle, who was to have

*Khudiakov may also have hoped to arrange the publication of some of his works abroad. He left a copy of the *Manual of Self-Instruction* with Herzen in Geneva. For a general account of Khudiakov's trip, see E. S. Vilenskaia, *Khudiakov* (Moscow, 1969), pp. 92-101.

†According to the testimony of a police informer who knew Khudiakov in exile, Khudiakov dismissed Herzen as a "'forties liberal" and said that Ogarëv was the "principal" figure of the two. See V. G. Bazanov, "I. A. Khudiakov i pokushenie Karakozova," *Russkaia literatura* No. 4 (1962), p. 160. On the low opinion of Herzen prevailing among the *Ishutintsy*, see M. M. Klevenky and K. G. Kotel'nikov, *Pokushenie Karakozova*, Vol. I (Moscow, 1928), p. 303.

“unlimited powers,” and the provincial nuclei were to be tightly subordinated to the center. Circle members were to continue to try to establish links with the peasants, specifically with religious schismatics, and to create schools and cooperative organizations. But Ishutin’s favorite proposition, that the end justifies the means, was to be enshrined as dogma. Furthermore, the draft insisted that in addition to employing propaganda, the group should have recourse to “the knife,” if and when it was necessary. It is not entirely clear whether “the knife” was to be used solely against political enemies or against internal deviants as well. But in another place it was suggested that the latter be threatened with “the dagger and poison.” This seems to have been the first time that pressure on the membership had been suggested in anything more than a purely conversational context. Nikolaev’s draft was shown only to the inner circle, however, and was never really adopted. Its primary value is that it indicates the direction of Ishutin’s thinking in the fall of 1865.

Much of Ishutin’s energy that fall was given over to the so-called Mutual Aid Society, which began as an offshoot of the bookbinding artel in which the *Ishutintsy* had been involved. The society disposed of a certain amount of capital, and its alleged function was to support various needy individuals and worthy projects; the Ivanova sisters’ cooperative of seamstresses, for instance, was granted one hundred rubles. By 1865, Ishutin and his friends could lay their hands on a fair amount of money—not enough, perhaps, to support major communal projects over the long haul, but enough to attract various needy individuals and groups. Many of the more marginal members of the group later testified that they had been attracted to Ishutin or to one or another of his projects because of their own abject poverty and because Ishutin could supply them with a job—teaching in one of the free schools, for instance—or simply give them money when they needed it. Even such central figures as Osip Motkov, the son of a freed serf and common-law husband of Aleksandra Ivanova, and her brother, Dmitry Ivanov, stressed their financial dependence on Ishutin.¹⁴ They were undoubtedly scrambling to save themselves at that stage, but their testimony points to the

attractive power of Ishutin's resources (some money had been collected by organizations like the Mutual Aid Society, and some donated by the richer members of the group, such as Ermolov and Maksimilian Zagibalov, a former medical student whose family estate was worth between five and ten thousand rubles). And it is certainly true that they were desperately poor; for many of the recruits of 1865-66, Ishutin must have been a powerfully attractive figure, with his radical and intransigent idealism, his resources, and the sense he conveyed, directly and indirectly, of being in touch with a myriad organizations and individuals with big plans and prospects. Here is how one participant remembers Ishutin addressing a meeting, called to organize a communal farm:

[We] sat in a circle; in the center was Ishutin the general (we thought of Ishutin as our general). We were all excited. Ishutin, gesticulating with his right hand, is recounting something with passion and animation. The picture changes: everyone remains in the same position with thoughtful faces. Ishutin, seeing that he has hit home, stands up, and to achieve an even greater effect, walks around the room, breathing heavily. I don't remember how many times I saw such tableaux.¹⁵

In any case, the real purpose of the Mutual Aid Society was recruitment. There were large meetings on Sundays, and smaller meetings on Wednesdays to set the agenda. If a prospect was judged to be "ready," he or she was invited to come to the Wednesday meetings as well. After the founding of Organization, its meetings took over the Wednesday slot. From then on, the Sunday meetings constituted a kind of gathering of Organization's applicant pool.

Thus the ground was well prepared for Khudiakov when he arrived in late November, bearing his tidings of the European Revolutionary Committee. (He must have had either the First International or Bakunin's International Brotherhood in mind, but he and Ishutin engaged in so much exaggeration and mystification in describing their relations—present and future—with the committee that no one has ever discovered for sure upon which Western body the accounts were based.) Khudiakov cer-

tainly provided the basic information, but the decision to create both Organization and Hell had to be made by Ishutin. Apparently, there was also a good deal of talk about "fulminate of mercury" and "Orsini-type bombs" as possible weapons.*

A word of caution is necessary at this point. It is almost impossible to avoid discussing Organization and Hell as if they were actually functioning bodies—like the Committee of Public Safety or the First International. But in a situation like this, the line demarcating an organization from the *idea* of an organization is rather blurred. As one reads through the testimony of the accused at their trial, it is hard to say whether either Organization or Hell ever *really* existed. For the members of the tribunal it sufficed that a person had been present at a certain number of meetings where the purposes and tasks of Organization were discussed. This was what "membership" was. Over a period of about three months a number of charters were discussed, but none was ever officially adopted; it is far from clear that Organization ever actually *did* anything as a body except discuss what it should be. It is therefore especially difficult to say when Organization actually came into such existence as it did have. Some members spoke vaguely of the final days of 1865, others of January 1866. The government's investigative body decided with admirable precision that Organization was born on February 7.

Far more important than any question of dates is the moral and political atmosphere that surrounded the group at the time and their view of how and to what ends they should organize themselves. If we compare the draft charters with what we know of the structure of Land and Liberty, a new stress on hierarchy, organization, discipline—and terror—is apparent at once. All of them made the provincial centers subordinate to the "center" in Moscow. (In some drafts, there were *two* centers, one in Moscow and one in St. Petersburg; there was some friction about Moscow's leading role.) And the fundamental aim of Organization was to use "all possible means," including regicide, to over-

*Fulminate of mercury was an explosive salt of fulminic acid, often used in the manufacture of explosives; Orsini was an Italian nationalist who attempted to assassinate Louis Napoleon with a bomb in 1858.

throw the existing order and inaugurate the social republic.

Many of the more recent recruits disagreed with the *Ishutintsy* on matters of detail, however, and as the weeks passed, these disagreements grew rather than diminished. By late March, as we shall see, Ishutin's position and his whole attitude toward making the revolution had been called into question. Even at the outset there was some disagreement as to whether final authority should rest with a majority of the Moscow center, or whether some single individual (read: Ishutin) should have that power. Should the group plan on an "armed uprising"? Should each member carry a revolver and learn to shoot? It is difficult to reconstruct the debate from the inevitably self-serving testimony of the participants after they had been arrested, but the answer of the majority was apparently yes. Another question that came in for a great deal of discussion was what Organization's attitude should be toward members who got cold feet and tried to leave or who actually "betrayed" their comrades. Here the majority favored what they euphemistically called "punitive measures," but which must have meant death.

There was an increasingly heightened and feverish quality about these discussions, marked by a blend of childishness, cynicism, and ruthlessness. We have already mentioned the spirit of self-sacrifice that animated the *Ishutintsy*. Early in 1866, this began to take on strange and even grotesque forms. Viktor Fedoseev, whose older brother, Pavel, had been involved in radical politics for several years, became a member of Organization through the Mutual Aid Society. Shortly after Christmas, it occurred to him that he could make a real contribution to the cause by murdering his father and then placing his estate at the disposal of Organization. After brooding over this idea for some time, he went to his hometown in April, but was talked out of the plan by his brother.¹⁶ Other unusual fund-raising activities were also discussed. Mail robbery was one, and it was proposed that a group member become the "lackey" of a rich merchant and then rob him.¹⁷ One may perhaps see in these ideas, none of which ever got beyond the talking stage, the ancestors of the bank robberies that were carried out by the

Bolsheviks forty years later to enrich their party's treasury.

If Organization grew in part out of a previous felt need for greater discipline and control, Hell was the direct outgrowth of what Khudiakov told Ishutin about the European Revolutionary Committee. It was, in fact, to have some kind of connection with the European organization. In Russia, its main functions were two: from its membership was to be selected the man who would assassinate the Emperor (the timetable was very vague); and it was to supervise and control the activities of Organization. Thus Organization was to be directed, in an unspecified fashion, not only by its own hierarchy but by a semisecret body drawn from its own membership.*

The *Ishutintsy* began talking about Hell at approximately the same time as they formed Organization. It is best described as semi-secret because although systematic discussion of it was confined to an inner circle, word soon leaked out, and Ishutin discovered that many of his comrades—especially those who had not been tapped for membership—had doubts about such an organization and their relationship to it. Disentangling the strands of truth, falsehood, half-truth, and omission in the discussions about Hell is exceptionally difficult, since nearly all the information that we possess was delivered either to the government's Commission of Inquiry or in court. It was clear to all the defendants that although membership in Organization was a serious matter, membership in, or even knowledge of, Hell was far worse, since Hell was directly linked to regicide. Most of the defendants denied any knowledge of Hell; those who could not tried to maintain—not altogether implausibly—that Hell was merely an "idea" that had been discussed. Ishutin steadfastly denied that there had ever been more than loose talk.

Still, extensive discussions about Hell did take place, and in them the psychological extremism of the *Ishutintsy* is most graphically revealed: their isolation, their adolescent romanticism, their search for a heroic role for themselves in their coun-

*Vilenskaia considers Ishutin, Ermolov, N. P. Stranden, Zagibalov, Iurasov, Karakozov, Motkov, Shaganov, and Nikolaev to have been members of Hell. Note the heavy preponderance of the old Penza nucleus. See *Revoliutsionnoe podpol'e v Rossii (60-e gody XIX v)* (Moscow, 1965), p. 395.

try's history, their longing for "the deed." The member of Hell who was chosen to do the actual job was to prepare himself well in advance.

The potential assassins were to draw lots to determine who should make the attempt, and the man chosen was to cut himself off from his colleagues and adopt a way of life quite at variance with that of a revolutionary. He was to get drunk, find friends in the most doubtful circles, and even denounce people to the police. On the day of the assassination he was to use chemicals for disfiguring his face, so as to avoid being recognized, and to have in his pocket a manifesto explaining his reasons for what he was doing. As soon as he had carried out his attempt, he was to poison himself, and in his place another member of *Hell* would be chosen to continue the work which he had begun.¹⁸

Unquestionably, this program stirred up considerable opposition. At the trial, Osip Motkov and Dmitry Ivanov came forward as the leaders of those who had opposed Hell and had argued instead that the group as a whole should confine itself to attempting to implement the program of *What Is To Be Done?* Motkov in particular painted a striking picture of the development of opposition to Hell, to Ishutin's leadership, and subsequently to Karakozov's attempt. Motkov tried to persuade the court that it was the hard core of veterans (on occasion referred to as the *Ipatovtsy*, because their landlord was named Ipatov) who developed Hell, while a second group, whom he ingeniously called the "novices" and who were drawn into Ishutin's orbit rather later, fought against the *Ipatovtsy*.¹⁹ But no such clear-cut division in fact existed. Still, Ishutin's self-dramatization and obsession with secrecy, as well as Karakozov's obvious mental instability, were disturbing, quite apart from the discussions about Hell, which reached the majority of the membership in the form of vague rumors. Aleksandr Ivanov presented the most dramatic tableau of the developing opposition to Ishutin and his inner circle of some ten or a dozen. He related that he and several others planned to threaten Ishutin with death in order to get the real facts about Hell; they also planned to threaten the *Ipatovtsy* with

denunciation to the police if they did not have Karakozov committed and agree to leave Moscow.²⁰

All of which brings us to Dimitry Karakozov and his decision to assassinate Tsar Alexander. Professor Shestakov of the University of Kazan' remembered Karakozov's "pale and tired face, hair flowing onto his shoulders; he was noticeable for the carelessness of his clothes."²¹ He was just under twenty-six when he made his attempt, and he was a veteran of five years of personal hardship and vaguely "political" activity. His family were poor, provincial gentry, and the family fortunes had been declining for several generations; prior to the Emancipation, the family apparently owned fewer than fifty peasants. Karakozov's father had served in various posts in the Penza bureaucracy, most of them having to do with the courts. At one time he was a district police officer. About Karakozov's mother we know very little, save that she was Ishutin's aunt. By 1866, both of his parents were dead.

Karakozov finished the Penza gymnasium in 1860 and enrolled in the juridical faculty at the University of Kazan'. He had attended for only a few weeks when he was expelled, along with a number of other students, for "harassing" a professor; such episodes were common enough at the time, as we have seen. He remained out of the university for two years, during which time he lived primarily at home. He worked for a month and a half as a clerk for a local arbiter of the peace, helping to work out details of peasant emancipation. But the arrogance of his boss, together with the general indifference to, and incomprehension of, the needs of the peasantry that he found to be characteristic of the arbiters as a group, considerably deepened his hostility toward the existing order; according to Ishutin, he never spoke of this experience save with indignation and even fury.²²

Karakozov returned to the University of Kazan' in the fall of 1863, spent a year there, and then transferred to the juridical faculty of the University of Moscow. By this time, he had almost no financial resources, and like many another poor student, he attempted to eke out a living by giving lessons. But he was unable to make ends meet, and in the fall of 1865, he was dismissed from the university for failure to pay tuition. Taken all in all, his was

an experience calculated to radicalize a far more sanguine and stable person than Karakozov appears to have been.

Many of his comrades testified that Karakozov was prone to depression and hypochondria. Although he was normally an extremely quiet, solitary person who said little or nothing in meetings, he spoke often to his friends of a desire to commit suicide. On occasion in larger groups, he would burst out with something. One fringe member of the group once heard him say—of regicide—"Don't talk about it—do it. Those who talk about it won't do it." He was suddenly angry.²³ He would spend days at a time by himself, walking around the city or lying on his bed in his room.²⁴

On November 11, 1865, Karakozov was admitted to the clinic at the University of Moscow, where he remained for more than a month. He complained to the doctors of a "wracking pain in his stomach, frequent constipation, of an unpleasant sensation of heat in the area of his spinal vertebrae, difficulty with intellectual activities and a poor psychological condition."²⁵ This last would appear to have been the key factor. The doctors, however, pronounced him to be suffering from intestinal catarrh, compounded by "moderate" exhaustion. Intestinal catarrh was the least of Karakozov's problems; the doctors' report was hasty and superficial. At his trial, Karakozov's initial line of defense was that his disordered state of mind was the "first cause" of his attempt.

Neither Ishutin personally nor the members of Hell collectively were *directly* involved in Karakozov's decision to assassinate the Emperor. He arrived at the idea in an agonized, inward, personal way. His psychological condition clearly worsened after his release from the university clinic. His preoccupation with suicide appears to have grown. It is plausible to suggest, as Venturi does, that he "ceaselessly tormented himself with the thought of having to die before doing anything for the people."²⁶ In February 1866, he left word in Moscow that he had decided to drown himself and then undertook a pilgrimage of some kind to the Trinity-St. Sergius Monastery in Zagorsk, several kilometers north of Moscow.

Nevertheless, Karakozov's decision to assassinate Alexander

was taken under the influence of the ideas being discussed in connection with the European Revolutionary Committee and the founding of Hell. That Ishutin was the prime mover in those discussions must have impressed his cousin deeply. Perhaps even more important than the "ideas" was the intellectual and moral atmosphere. One contemporary claimed, as well, that ideas of regicide were by no means confined to Ishutin's circle, that other student radicals were preoccupied with them as well.²⁷ The combination of regicide and suicide became deeply attractive to Karakozov; indeed, he must have come to view it as an ideal solution to his problems. He no longer wished to live, and he wanted to make some kind of supreme sacrifice for the people.

The events that followed bear out this hypothesis. What is difficult to determine is the precise attitude that his comrades in Moscow and Khudiakov in St. Petersburg took toward his maturing intentions.²⁸ Certainly Karakozov set about the assassination according to the prescriptions that had been discussed in the meetings where Hell and regicide had been the prime topics. Having procured a revolver and several kinds of poison, Karakozov went to live in St. Petersburg in early March 1866. He saw Khudiakov a number of times and told him what he intended to do. The version of events that the *Ipatovtsy* gave at the trial ran roughly as follows. Having learned of Karakozov's intentions from Khudiakov, Ishutin sent Ermolov and Stranden, two of his most trusted disciples, to St. Petersburg to persuade him not to do it and to bring him back to Moscow. The two ran into Karakozov "by chance," and although they did not succeed in bringing him back with them, they did exact from him a promise that he would not make the attempt. Meanwhile, Ishutin sent a letter, which reached Karakozov on March 21, and he then did return to Moscow on the twenty-fifth. By this time, Karakozov had written a manifesto, from which all mention of regicide had been deleted, and distributed it, rather inefficiently. It may well be, as Vilenskaia suggests, that Karakozov originally intended to make the attempt on March 19 or 20.

What Ishutin and his friends said to Karakozov in Moscow is quite unclear. We do know that a few days later Karakozov went

back to St. Petersburg. Ishutin and his friends claimed that he did so without either their approval or their knowledge, but we have only their word for that. Khudiakov, almost certainly, was in doubt only about when Karakozov would actually make the attempt; he had given Karakozov the money to buy the pistol, and he was under no illusions as to how it would be spent. A young doctor with radical connections, Dr. Aleksandr Kobylin,²⁹ had given him several different kinds of poison, which he intended to take after shooting the Emperor, as had been earlier agreed upon by the *Ishutintsy* in such a case.

On April 4, Karakozov entered the Summer Gardens and fired on Alexander as the Emperor was about to enter his carriage. He was dressed in peasant costume, and in his pocket, along with the strychnine, morphine, and prussic acid that Kobylin had given him, were two copies of the manifesto that he had earlier written and addressed to his "worker friends":

Brothers, for a long time I have been tormented by the thought which has given me no rest: why does my beloved, simple Russian *narod*, by which all Russia is supported, live in such poverty? Why does it not benefit by its unremitting hard work, its sweat and blood . . . ? Why, together with our eternal toilers, the simple people—peasants, factory hands and other workmen—do others who do nothing live in luxurious houses and palaces—gentry parasites, a horde of officials and other rich people, and they live at the expense of the simple people . . . they suck the blood of the peasant. . . . I wanted to find out what clever people thought about this, I began to read various books, I devoted myself to reading many books about how people lived in former, olden times. And brothers, I learned that it's the tsars who are the real culprits in all our misfortunes. The tsars gathered to themselves officials to make it easier for them to fleece the people, to make every kind of requisition on them, and so that the people would not think of opposing these collectors, they created for themselves, most opportunely, a permanent army. So that the officials would sincerely serve the tsarist belly and not feel sorry for the peasant's pocket, the tsars began to reward this scum in all sorts of ways. They called them gentry, landowners, and began to hand out land to them right and left. The peasants who until then had been owners of this same land, were delivered into slavery at the hands of their landlord-officials. . . . Thus serfdom came to us in Rus'. Tsars,

officials and landlords began to live at the expense of peasant labor. Think about this, brothers, consider it, and you will see that the tsar is chief among the landlords; he has never stretched out his hand to the peasant because—he is the greatest enemy of the simple people.³⁰

Thus did Karakozov launch his paper thunderbolt against the rock of peasant monarchism. He then went on to expose the Emancipation and excoriate its imperial author. He described his travels around the country and the popular misery that he everywhere encountered. And so he concluded “sadly,”

I decided to annihilate the tsar evildoer and to die myself for my beloved people. If I succeed, I die with the thought that my death will be useful to my dear friend, the Russian peasant. And if I should not succeed, I believe all the same that people will be found who will follow my path. If I do not succeed—they will succeed. My death will be an example to them and will inspire them. Let the Russian people recognize its chief and mightiest enemy—whether it be Alexander II or Alexander III—and nothing else matters.³¹

Then, without mentioning the word “revolution,” Karakozov spoke of his great hope: that the death of the Tsar would mean the automatic destruction or disappearance of the host of petty tyrants whom he had called into existence. With these creatures gone, Karakozov said, there would be liberty (*volia*) indeed. He spoke of the communal future in generally Populist language, but in such a way as to remind us of the particular focus that *What Is To Be Done?*² had provided the *Ishutintsy*:

The land will not belong to idle parasites but to artels, societies of the workers themselves. And capital will not be squandered by the tsar, the landlords and the tsarist magnates, but will belong to the workers' artels themselves. The artels will produce a profitable return on this capital and the income will be divided equally among all the workers in the artels. And if the Russian people has these means, it will be able to administer itself even without the tsar . . . everyone will be equal and Russian working people will live happily and honestly, working only for themselves and not for the benefit of the insatiable greed of

the Russian tsars, the tsarist magnates, the tsar's family, the landlords and the other parasites. . . . This is my last word to my worker friends. Let each of you, into whose hands this leaflet falls, copy it and give it to your acquaintances to read, and let them put it into other hands.³²

At the end, Karakozov came back to his own hopes and the message that he wanted to convey to the working people of Russia, whose attention he had despaired of attracting in any other way:

May the workers recognize that the person writing these lines was thinking of their happiness and that they must look after themselves, rely upon nobody but themselves, conquer their own happiness and deliver all Russia from the plunderers and scoundrels.³³

Karakozov's shot went wild—either because he was too nervous, or because he had not learned to shoot, or because his cheap pistol misfired. He ran across the garden but was quickly apprehended by two guards.

Alexander came over to him; perhaps under the impression that he was a disappointed office seeker, he asked, "What do you want?"

"I don't want anything," Karakozov replied. When the Emperor asked him who he was, he was able to recover slightly. "A Russian," he said.

Then Alexander told the guards to take him to the Third Section, and a number of bystanders were taken off as well, in case they had anything to do with the criminal.

Despite the hopes of Karakozov (and Khudiakov as well), popular disillusion with the Emperor, with "Little Father Tsar," was still far in the future. The pathos of Karakozov was comprehensible only within the most restricted *obshchestvo* circles. Elsewhere in the country, the initial shock turned to patriotic and pious thanksgiving; the hand of God was generally seen in Alexander's deliverance. Although the most reactionary political forces were quick to exploit this mood, it was genuine enough; ironically, for a time *obshchestvo* and the

narod did find themselves at one—in relief at the Emperor's survival!

In keeping with his deepest feelings (and his costume), Karakozov maintained for several days that he was a peasant. But it proved impossible to conceal his identity for long. He had on his person a long letter to Ishutin (whose last name, however, did not appear) and a scrap of paper with the name of an accomplice on it. His landlord for the past several days soon missed him, guessed who he was, had his room searched. Characteristically, he had been careless about crucial details. He had left some papers behind; Ishutin's address was written on an envelope. Most of the Moscow group were quickly rounded up, together with Khudiakov—twenty-some persons. General Murav'ëv, fresh from the "pacification" of Poland, was chosen to head up the Commission of Inquiry that was quickly established.

After a lengthy preliminary investigation, thirty-five people were brought to trial. No one presented a model of revolutionary fortitude, although Khudiakov did not disgrace himself by breaking down. Karakozov spent long hours on his knees in his prison cell. He wrote several times to Alexander. His first letter was resolute, composed, unrepentant; it repeated some of what he had written to the workers. He predicted the outbreak of the revolution in the near future and concluded: "As for me, Sire, I can only say that if I had not one but a hundred lives, and if the people demanded that I should sacrifice all the hundred lives to promote their welfare, I swear that I would not hesitate a moment to make that sacrifice."³⁴ But at his trial he implicated Khudiakov and tried to plead what amounted to insanity, plausibly enough. Upon receiving the verdict that he was to be hanged, Karakozov wrote several more notes to the Emperor, conceding the "monstrous" nature of his offense and again claiming that his abnormal condition of mind was to blame for what he had done. Although he had apparently not been a believer,* he now appealed to Alexander, as Christian to Christian, to forgive him.

*If we look at Karakozov's behavior, beginning with his trip to the Trinity-St. Sergius Monastery in February and ending with his long hours of prayer in prison, it is possible to conclude that he underwent a genuine religious conversion. From a psychological point of view, this would seem quite plausible.

The Emperor resolved this dilemma by replying that as a Christian he freely forgave him, but as the Tsar he could not. On September 3, 1866, Karakozov was hanged in St. Petersburg.

Nearly everyone whose involvement with Ishutin had been more than fleeting received a sentence of some severity. Like Karakozov, Ishutin was to be hanged, but at the very last instant the sentence was commuted to penal servitude for life. After several years of confinement in the Schlüsselburg Fortress, Ishutin was sent to Siberia, where in 1879 he died of tuberculosis in a prison hospital.*

Khudiakov needed a good lawyer, and fortunately he got one. He was attacked with special violence in the right-wing press, largely because the influential journalist Mikhail Katkov took a particular dislike to him. Perhaps the xenophobic Katkov associated him with some kind of subversive Petersburg cosmopolitanism; certainly he was enraged by Khudiakov's manner: defiant but slightly cringing; the high voice and the flickering, nervous half-smile. But Khudiakov was convicted only of failing to denounce Ishutin and the Moscow conspiracy, for which he was to be sent to "the most remote part" of Siberia, which meant the tiny village of Verkhoiansk, in the extreme northeast of the Asian continent, which currently boasts the lowest recorded temperature of any city in the world. His young child was dead of smallpox by this time, and he did not allow his wife to accompany him. His mother, that mysterious figure whom he never mentioned in his memoirs, sold her house and joined him in exile.

For a time, Khudiakov lived in Verkhoiansk with two local cossacks in a tent (this must have been prior to his mother's arrival). He was consumed with the desire to do useful work, as were so many Russian political exiles, and he worked hard for a while on the language of the local Yakut people, producing a grammar and the beginnings of a dictionary. Neither, appar-

*For an interview with Ishutin shortly before his death, see S. Bogdanov, "Ishutin," *Katorga i ssylka*, No. 17 (1925), pp. 248-50. Ishutin denied to his interlocutor, another political prisoner, that the group had ever seriously contemplated regicide. He spoke instead of the postrevolutionary world that would come into existence someday, of the building of artels and communes, of how the political authority of the future would somehow emerge from an "alliance" of the communes, which would own all the land in Russia. The language throughout is vaguely Populist; there is no residue of Jacobin extremism.

ently, survived, but his quite ambitious "description" of the region (from the standpoint of climate, geology, botany, and so on) turned up recently and has appeared in a Soviet edition.³⁵

Despite these ambitious efforts to stave off despair, the accumulated disappointments of his life (including the realization that Russia was far from a revolution of any sort) took their toll, and in the early 1870s, signs of incipient madness began to appear. There was less and less that, in view of moral considerations, he felt able to eat: vegetables, too, were living things. He finally decided that eating was not a necessity, merely a habit. He began to suffer from what Vilenskaia refers to as "hallucinations with a religious content"; from another point of view, they might be called visions. After he began to have trouble with his memory as well, the local authorities tried to get permission to move him to where he could be institutionalized, but were unsuccessful. He died on September 19, 1876, shortly after the death of his mother, who had remained with him throughout his exile.³⁶

Karakozov's assassination attempt had, of course, an enormous impact in Russia, and some abroad. Most working people misunderstood Ishutin and Karakozov in precisely the same way that they had misunderstood the student rebels of the early 1860s—or so it would appear. Any open expression of support for Karakozov would have been both pointless and dangerous, of course. Far better to choose to believe—and this belief was encouraged by various local authorities—that Karakozov's act had been a protest *against* the Emancipation by an agent of disgruntled serf owners. At first glance, however, it is somewhat more surprising to find the United States Congress adopting this position; a joint resolution congratulated the Emperor and the nation on Alexander's escape from the machinations of an "enemy of the emancipation."³⁷ But it is understandable that American politicians should have imposed their own interpretation on events. In Moscow, students were attacked on the streets, as they had been four years earlier, sometimes by suspiciously well-organized groups; on occasion, they needed protection by soldiers. In the country-

side, rumors spread of an aristocratic plot against the Tsar Liberator.³⁸

The government had a popular hero of its own to promote: he was a "peasant" named Osip Komissarov, who, it was alleged, had jolted the hand of the assassin and saved Alexander's life. Thus the government countered the revolutionary myth of the peasantry with a myth of its own: a true representative of the *narod* had saved the Little Father. Komissarov became the man of the hour. His portrait was displayed, together with that of the Emperor, all over St. Petersburg; he was eulogized in the press and treated to a seemingly endless round of banquets; he was given a large estate by a group of landowners from Kostroma province and a big house in the capital by someone else; he was ennobled by the Emperor.³⁹

But the whole thing was a fake. Komissarov had not jolted Karakozov's hand; he was not a peasant, but a capmaker well along the road to alcoholism. Having been taken to police headquarters in the roundup of bystanders, he had tried to extricate himself by claiming that he had actually *prevented* the villainous aristocrat from carrying out his nefarious plan.

After a while, Komissarov was forgotten, as his drunken and stuttering performances at the banquets were more embarrassing than edifying. I have been unable to discover what happened to his estate, with the "lackeys" and coachmen who had been hired for him, or to the town house. But he did not die until 1892, so the legend that he "soon drank himself to death" appears to be the wishful thinking of the Left.

The government did not limit itself to such public-relations ventures as the banquet campaign for Komissarov ("the Weapon of God"). As they had after the fires, the Right realized that the latest revolutionary outrage presented a golden opportunity. Mikhail Katkov thundered against radicals *and* reformers in the *Moscow Gazette*, demanding that A. V. Golovnin, the moderate and canny minister of education, resign. Golovnin's position quickly became impossible; while Katkov was describing him as a "Herzen in uniform," Dmitry Tolstoy mounted a more considered attack on his policies in the Council of Ministers.⁴⁰ Within

ten days, Alexander had thanked him for his services and replaced him with Tolstoy, who moved over from the Holy Synod. Prince V. A. Dolgorukov, the head of the Third Section, chose to blame himself for Karakozov's attempt, and within an hour of the episode had handed in his resignation to his master, confessing brokenly that he felt too old to deal with such things. Count A. A. Suvorov, governor-general of St. Petersburg, also resigned and was replaced by General F. F. Trepov, who had already distinguished himself as a tough and ruthless chief of police in Warsaw. Vera Zasulich shot him in 1878 for having a prisoner brutally flogged; by that time he had become one of the best-hated men in Russia.

The most important change was probably the replacement of Dolgorukov by General P. A. Shuvalov, a man who has recently been described as "terrifyingly able" and "known even to his intimates as 'power loving' and 'cunning.'" ⁴¹ The new head of Russia's political police wasted no time. He closed down the *Contemporary* and the *Russian Word*—this time permanently. Measures were threatened against "nihilist women who wear no crinolines and round hats, blue glasses and short hair." ⁴² Shuvalov substantially augmented funds for various security agencies, but the heart of his program was to increase enormously the power and scope of the provincial governors, who at the same time were to be subject to much greater centralized control; this Shuvalov easily accomplished. He then turned his attention to the newly created zemstvos, the local administrative organs, which he regarded as even more subversive of public order and morals than students and Poles. The zemstvos soon found themselves the object of a concerted campaign of official harassment, and the St. Petersburg zemstvo was actually shut down for a time. ⁴³

In the post-Karakozov climate, the decimated ranks of the Left scrambled to save what they could. Herzen, his influence in Russia now almost totally gone, denounced Karakozov in the May 1 number of the *Bell* as "some fanatic," ⁴⁴ and Nekrasov—radical, poet, and editor of the *Contemporary*—made a truly spectacular submission. Apparently hoping to save his journal, he read two poems at formal dinners in the precincts of the highly

conservative English Club. One was a paeon to Komissarov,* and the other—which *must* have stuck in his throat—was a tribute to Count Murav'ëv, head of the Commission of Inquiry that had investigated the Karakozov attempt. Progressive circles had dubbed Murav'ëv "the Hangman of Vilna" for the brutality with which he had suppressed the Polish rebellion, and Nekrasov's reputation for opportunism grew.

Almost nothing now was left of that "liberal" public opinion that had been on the ascendant between 1855 and 1862. Almost all the major figures of the Left were in emigration or in prison—or had lost their following. By contrast, the influence of Mikhail Katkov was increasing dramatically. His constituency had been growing since 1862, but he now became the confidant of high government officials and entered into a kind of collaboration with the new minister of education, Dmitry Tolstoy. A leftish prerevolutionary Russian historian called him the "mouthpiece of the state,"⁴⁵ and at certain moments, at any rate, he was probably the most influential man in Russia.

Politically speaking, Tolstoy was a somewhat more complex figure than Katkov. The increase in state control, the classical curriculum, and the general reorganization of Russian higher education that he introduced after 1866 have generally been interpreted as political obscurantism, pure and simple. Recently, however, the American historian Allen Sinel has argued that Tolstoy's aims were less narrow and negative; in addition to stamping out sedition, he was genuinely concerned with the creation of a disciplined and able governing elite for Russia.⁴⁶ However that may be, Tolstoy certainly wished in the short run to assert greater state control over the Russian universities, which he correctly observed were the breeding grounds of radicalism and sedition.

To this end stricter rules governing student conduct were issued in 1867. The police were instructed to report student delinquents to

*Nekrasov felt constrained to refer to Komissarov as "the Weapon of God," as did everyone else. For a balanced account of the episode, which takes full account of the panic on the Left, see Kornei Chukovsky, "Poet ili palach," *Nekrasov* (Leningrad, 1926), pp. 5-55.

university authorities, and they in turn were to inform the police of any student acts that might raise doubts of political and moral reliability. Tolstoy's new rules forbade the students to organize public entertainments in order to raise funds for their impoverished colleagues. Funds raised by outsiders were not to be given directly to the students, but to university officials for distribution to those in "genuine need" and "worthy of support."⁴⁷

The period following Karakozov's attempt has gone down in Russian history under the name of "the white terror," and although the terror was mild enough by twentieth-century standards, it did appear for a time as if the reactionaries were to have matters their own way. Even within the universities there were patriotic demonstrations of a variety of kinds. In Moscow, a large crowd of students (led by a violinist playing "God Save the Tsar") marched around town, ending at the offices of the *Moscow Gazette*, where they hailed Katkov vociferously.⁴⁸

Populist sentiment and ideas, of course, could not be stamped out, but they were driven even farther underground. Disillusion with the *narod*, though, reached one of its periodic high points. The career of Sergei Nechaev, to which we shall now turn, marked the culmination of the attempt to substitute the lone figure of the dedicated revolutionary for the strength of a mass movement. It also marked the acme of the revolutionary amorality and mystification that were so striking in Organization and Hell.